

THE
INSTRUCTIONS
OF A 2
Parish Minister
TO HIS
PARISHIONERS,
ON THE
Subject of POPERY.

Occasioned by the late Growth of Popery
in this Kingdom.

PART II.

L O N D O N:

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Subject

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Part of the Instructions which were
concerning the Progress of the said
our Lord Jesus Christ, and the publick
Worship of the Country, which I have

shown to be great and dangerous
I have now to lay before you
I have now to lay before you
I have now to lay before you

H. B. 1733

T H E
I N S T R U C T I O N S

O F A
Parish Minister, &c.

P A R T II.

Neighbours and Friends,

IN the first Part of these Instructions which I have already put into your Hands, I have considered those Parts of the popish Doctrine which concern the Honour due to God and our Lord Jesus Christ, and the publick Worship of the Church; which I have shewn to be great and dangerous Corruptions. I come now to consider some other Doctrines not less dangerous, as
B they

they are a Snare to the Consciences of Men; to give you a clear and distinct View of which I must lay open to you that whole *Mystery of Iniquity* which the Church of Rome calls *the Sacrament of PENANCE*; which (if you will believe the Council of Trent) “ God hath
 “ granted as a Remedy unto Life to
 “ those who, after Baptism, should de-
 “ liver themselves up to the Service of
 “ Sin; and is as necessary to those who
 “ have fallen after Baptism, as Bap-
 “ tism itself is necessary to the Salva-
 “ tion of those who have not yet been
 “ made Christians”.

THEY pretend that “ this Sacrament
 “ Christ *then* chiefly instituted, when,
 “ after he was raised from the Dead,
 “ he *breathed* upon his Disciples and
 “ said, * *Receive ye the Holy Ghost; who-*
 “ *soever Sins ye remit, they are remitted unto*
 “ *them; and whosoever Sins ye retain they*
 “ *are retained*”; by which Words (as the
 Church of Rome interprets) “ our Saviour
 “ constituted his Priests, his REPRE-
 “ SENTATIVES TO SIT IN JUDGMENT,
 “ and TAKE COGNIZANCE of all mortal
 “ Sins,

as *John 20. 22, 23.*

“ Sins, into which Christians might
“ fall ; and then (according to the
“ Power of the Keys committed to
“ them) to pass Sentence ; whereby
“ such Sins should be remitted or re-
“ tained”, that is, should stand forgiven
or not forgiven in the Sight of God.

AND because “ that without due
“ Knowledge of the Cause, the Priests
“ cannot give Judgment, nor assign to
“ each Offence its proper Punishment” ;
therefore the Church of *Rome* insists up-
“ on it, as NECESSARY BY DIVINE
“ RIGHT, that all Persons who shall
“ lapse after Baptism, do make an EN-
“ TIRE CONFESSION, of all mortal (ev-
“ en the most secret) Sins, of which
“ (after the most diligent Examinati-
“ on,) they shall be conscious to them-
“ selves that they have been guilty” ;
which done the Priest pronounces
“ ABSOLUTION “ the Effect of which
“ (they say) is nothing less than RE-
“ CONCILIATION WITH GOD” . *

To do Justice to the Church of *Rome*,
it must here be noted, that according
to her Doctrine, this Effect will not

• Conc. Trid. Sess. 13. Cap. 2. 3.

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follow but upon the Supposition of certain Qualifications necessary on the Part of the Penitent; and what these Qualifications are, will be opened to you in due Time. But it will be proper, in the first Place to examine the *principal Point*, and see whether our Lord Jesus Christ did constitute his Priests to be his Representatives in such a Sort as to vest them with Authority to sit in Judgment, and take Cognizance of *all* (or indeed, of *any*) Sins committed after Baptism, for the Purpose of declaring them remitted or retained in THE SIGHT OF GOD. That the Text in *St. John*, upon which the Church of *Rome* builds her Pretensions carries some very important Meaning, and convey'd to the Apostles some high Trust, the Terms in which it is conceived, and the solemn Manner in which those Words were delivered, will leave us no room to question. But whether the popish Interpretation is right, is the Point to be enquired into; and to prepare the Way for this Enquiry, it will be of great and necessary Use, to look into the New Testament, and see how the *Fact* there stands. That

That Christ had *Power on Earth to forgive Sins*, will bear no Dispute; for he tells us so expressly, *Mark ii. 10.* In some Places we find him *exercising* this Power; for he said to the Sick of the Palsy, *Son thy Sins be forgiven thee*, Verse 5. — Of the Woman who washed his Feet with Tears, and wiped them with the Hairs of her Head, *her Sins are forgiven.* Luke vii. 47. — And (which is as full and formal an Absolution as any of the rest) to the Thief upon the Cross, *to day shalt thou be with me in Paradise.* Chap. xxiii. Verse 43. But these Instances are nothing to our present Purpose. For the Sins here forgiven, were not Sins committed *after Baptism*; but Sins committed antecedently to the Acceptance of the Gospel: And it is very material to be observed, that there is not one single Instance upon Record of his sitting in Judgment upon any to give Sentence concerning Sins committed after Baptism, whether they were or were not remitted in the Sight of God. In Truth this was no Part of his *prophetic Office*; but is a Branch of that *Regal Authority* which he was to re-

ceive after his Ascension into Heaven, where he was to be placed at Gods Right Hand, as the appointed Judge of the Quick and Dead. Christ's Business on Earth was to offer Remission and Salvation to all that would accept his Gospel. He knew the Hearts of all Men, and those who came to him with Faith and Repentance, he pronounced, absolved from all their *past* Offences. But as to his taking Account of any for their Behaviour *after* they had accepted the Gospel, and deciding upon their Case, whether they were or were not qualified for the Kingdom of Heaven, we read nothing of it; and it is a Point which he hath reserved expressly to the Judgment of the last Day.

It is not very likely that Christ should have committed a Power to his Ministers which He (qualified as he was) never thought fit to exercise himself. Nor do we read any Example of it. There can be no Question but that in all the Churches planted by the Apostles, there were Numbers of Christians who had committed mortal Sins after Baptism, and consequently who, according to po-
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pish Principles, needed the Sacrament of Penance if there had been such a Remedy provided for them. But do we ever find any of the Apostles in his Chair of Confession, sitting as Judge over the Consciences of Men, and pronouncing them absolved in the Sight of God? Not once. Strange! that if Christ had opened such a Court as this, we should hear of no Suiters; or that when there is such frequent mention in Scripture of the Use of those two Sacraments which he certainly did appoint (*viz.* Baptism and the Lord's Supper), there should be another which (if you will believe the Church of Rome) is as necessary as either of the other two, of which there is neither Shadow nor Footstep to be found in Scripture! St. James indeed says, *Confess your Faults one to another.* Jam. v. 16. But it does not appear that this hath any Relation to Penance. For it is not said confess to a Priest, in order to receive Absolution. Confession made to a Fellow-Christian (whether Priest or no Priest) has its use, and may be adviseable in many Cases, as it helps to relieve the Mind oppressed with Grief and qualifies us to receive

the Advice and Counsel of wise and good Men, and the Assistance of their Prayers; and to this Sense the Context seems plainly to direct us. *Confess your Faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent Prayer of a righteous Man availeth much.* He says, a *righteous Man* at large not a *Priest*; or if, because a Verse or two before Mention is made of calling for the *Elders of the Church*, you will have this *righteous Man* to mean a *Priest*; it is still plain what this *Priest* was to do: He was to *pray in the Name of the Lord*, but of his pronouncing Absolution there is not a single Syllable; an Authority which (in the Sense in which it is now challenged by the Church of Rome) St. *Paul* hath most solemnly disclaimed by declaring himself unqualified for it. *With me* (says he) *it is a small Thing that I should be judged of you, or of Man's Judgment; yea I judge not mine ownself. For I know nothing by myself, or (as the Words should have been rendered) I am conscious to myself of nothing; I can charge myself with no Crime; yet am I not hereby justified, but he that judgeth*

me

me is the Lord, 1 Cor. iv. 3—6. He would not (you see) trust himself to judge of himself with respect to his Merit or Demerit before God. And is it likely that he should know of any Authority he had to sit in Judgement upon other Men's Consciences, and to pronounce them justified before God, who declares he was not qualified to decide upon his own Justification? Or would he have spoken so contemptuously of all human Judgment in this Respect, if he had known that Christ had erected a Tribunal of Conscience here on Earth, to which, at the Peril of their Salvation, all Christians were obliged to have recourse for Judgment? He certainly knew of no such Tribunal, and therefore he adds in the following Verse, *Judge nothing before the Time until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden Things of Darkness, and will make manifest the Counsels of the Hearts, and then shall every Man have praise of God;* which in as plain Terms as Language can furnish, is removing the Judgment of Conscience, and of that future Interest that depends upon Conscience, from all hu-

man Tribunals to Christ's Tribunal at the *last Day*, where *alone* Conscience *can* be tried, *or* *by* *any* *other* *Man*. Thus much then, I think, we have gained; that whatever be the *true* Interpretation of the Passage in St. *John* above-mentioned, the popish Interpretation is certainly *false*; and, if the Church of *Rome* had not a peculiar Talent at hammering Sacraments out of any Thing, she could never have found her Sacrament of *Penance* here. Here is indeed a Power granted to the Apostles to *remit* and *retain* *Sins*; but of *Confession* (which, in their own Account, is *one* essential Part of the Sacrament) nothing is said. But the *decisive* Evidence against the popish Interpretation is, that it sets up an Institution as necessary to Salvation, of the Use of which, in the Apostles Times, there is no Instance to be found; and puts a Power into the Hands of mortal Men which no mortal Man can possibly execute. When Christ said to the Sick of the Palsy, *thy Sins are forgiven thee*; the Scribes (who considered him as a mere Man) charged him with *Blasphemy*, and asked *Who can forgive Sins*

Sins but God only? Our Saviour in his Answer (without *divesting* God of his *sole* Right to forgive Sins) sticks to his Point, that *he himself* had Power to forgive Sins, and by this effectually declared his Divinity. What Power Christ had the same he might communicate to his Apostles in every Instance, and to every Degree, in which, in the Nature of it, it was communicable; and St. *John* tells us that he gave them Power to *re-mit* and *retain* Sins. But in what Sense? — This is the great Point now to be tried.

THERE are two Senses in which Sins may be said to be forgiven. The First is when particular Persons are declared forgiven upon *personal Knowledge* of of their inward Qualifications. This is the Power which is claimed by the popish Clergy, who do not indeed pretend to know the Secrets of Mens Hearts; but (to supply this Defect) insist upon the Sinners' Confession, that being, by him, rightly informed of the State of his Conscience, they may, upon such Information, pronounce him absolved. But are they sure that they know the true State of a Man's Conscience by his Confession?

session? Are they sure that they know
 the true State of their own Consciences
 when they judge of themselves? St.
Paul has told them otherwise. But this
 is sure, that Christ had this Knowledge;
 and it is as sure that the Apostles had it
 not nor ever pretended to it; and there-
 fore there is a remarkable Difference in
 the manner in which each of them ex-
 press themselves. Christ said peremp-
 torily, *thy Sins ARE forgiven thee*. The
 Apostles (as it well became them) spake
 in an humbler Style, *If thou shalt confess*
with thy Mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt
believe in thine Heart, &c. thou shalt be
saved, or thou mayst be baptized. Rom. x.
 9. Act. viii. 37. And so I may say, or
 any one else may say, now, If you be-
 lieve and repent, God will forgive you.
 In this *first* Sense, then the Apostles had
 not the Power of *remitting* and *retaining*
 Sins, as it was in the Nature of it *incom-*
municable. They called Men to the
 Faith of the Gospel, and as many as
 came to them professing their Faith they
 received into the Church by Baptism.
 But never did they say to any of them
 (as Christ said) *thy Sins ARE forgiven*
thee;

thee; or (as the Church of Rome says) *I absolve thee*. It is true, the same Form (long and *justly* in disuse) stands in our Liturgy; and what may be said in *Excuse* for it will be considered afterwards.

At present let us attend to the Point before us, and proceed to the *second* Sense of *remitting* or *retaining* Sins, which is, when any Person, by sufficient Authority, declares the *Law*, or the *Terms*, upon which Sins shall be remitted or retained. If the King, under his Broad Seal, should issue out a Pardon to all Traytors so or so qualified; the Treason would be as strictly and properly *remitted* to all who should stand within the Conditions, as if their Names had been particularly mentioned. In like manner, when Christ made a *general* Offer of Remission to all who by Faith and true Repentance should come to him, he did as strictly and properly remit the Sins of all who were, or should be thus qualified, as he did the Sins of those to whom he said personally, *thy Sins ARE forgiven thee*. Now this Authority was *communicable*; and this Authority he did in Fact communicate to his Apostles, as all the

the Evangelists bear Witness. St. Mark tells us, that when Christ, after his Resurrection, appeared to his eleven Apostles, *he said unto them Go YE into all the World and preach the Gospel to every Creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned,* Mark xvi. 15, 16. St. Matthew, speaking of the same Thing, expresseth it thus, *All Power is given unto me both in Heaven and in Earth; Go YE therefore and teach all Nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all Things whatsoever, I have commanded you.* Mat. xxviii. 18. St. Luke more briefly thus; *Thus it be-
hoved Christ to suffer—and that Repentance and Remission of Sins should be preached IN HIS NAME among all Nations, and YE ARE WITNESSES of these Things.* Luk. xxiv. 46. No Man can doubt of the Sense of these Passages, which, one and all of them, speak to this Effect, viz. That Christ now constituted his Apostles his REPRESENTATIVES here on Earth, vesting them with the same Authority which he had in himself to publish the Law of
For-

Forgiveness to all the World. This was their COMMISSION; which, as yet wanted a SEAL, for which they were to tarry a while at Jerusalem, viz. the Power of the Holy Ghost to enable them to work Miracles, to stand as Evidence wherever they came, that they spake not in their own Names, but in the Name and by the Authority of Christ. Behold I send the Promise of the Father upon you—Tarry ye at the City of Jerusalem, until ye be endowed with Power from on high. Luk. xxiv. 49. And Act. i. 8. Ye shall receive Power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you, and ye shall be Witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem and in Judea and in Samaria, and unto the utmost Part of the Earth. You will see the Accomplishment of this Promise in the second Chapter of this History, the particulars of which I have no need to repeat.

LET us now see what Light will arise from hence, to enable us to interpret the Words of St. John now in Question. That they relate to the same Subject, viz. the COMMISSION granted to the Apostles to preach the Gospel to all the World is most evident; for they stand
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connected with this Commission and with the Promise of the Holy Ghost which was relative to it. *As my Father hath sent me even so send I you, and when he had said this he breathed on them, and saith unto them, receive ye the Holy Ghost. Whosoever Sins ye remit they are remitted unto them; and whosoever Sins ye retain they are retained.* If the Holy Ghost was actually given at this Time, and the Words are not rather to be understood as an Intimation of what was to be done hereafter; it could only be the Pledge and Earnest of that most plentiful Communication of the Gifts of the Spirit which they were to receive and did receive at the Day of Pentecost. But St. John's—*As my Father hath sent me even so send I you,* means plainly the same Thing with St. Mark's—*Go ye into all the World and preach the Gospel;* and with St. Matthew's—*Go ye therefore and teach all Nations;* and with St. Luke's—*Ye are Witnesses to preach Repentance and Remission of Sins among all Nations.* Since then the Commission in St. John does so manifestly agree with what the other Evangelists say in this Respect, what should hinder

us from concluding that there is the same Agreement with Respect to the Words in Question; and that the Power assigned to the Apostles by the Phrase of *remitting* and *retaining* Sins, is the *very same* that is assigned to them by St. Mark, when he reports our Saviour as saying in *express* Terms (what the Words of the other two Evangelists St. Matthew and St. Luke very plainly imply) *He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned?* This is the Interpretation of Zuinglius * one of our first Reformers abroad; which I so much the rather adhere to, because (which is very remarkable) whereas the Rest of the Evangelists, in *none* of their reports concerning Christ's Conversation with his Apostles *after* his Resurrection, say any thing at all of the Power of *remitting* and *retaining* of Sins; St. John, who mentions this Power, says nothing of any *Declaration* made by Christ, that they that *believed* upon the Preaching of the Apostles should be *saved*, and that they that believed *not*

* Oper. Tom. 1. p. 95. in Exp. Artic. *Solus Deus remittit peccata.*

should

should be *damned*; which (to my Apprehension) plainly shews, that one and the same thing was intended by both, otherwise the other Evangelists must be defective. St. *John* in his Gospel (by Way of Supplement) has recorded many Passages of our Saviour's Life and Conversation not mentioned by the other Evangelists. But it is scarce to be supposed, that in recording his great and last Commission to his Apostles the other Evangelists should have omitted any material Part of it, which yet will be the Case, if the Power of remitting and retaining Sins carries any such Meaning as the Church of *Rome* pretends to. For surely it is not an indifferent Matter for us to know whether Man hath or hath not Power to sit as Judge of Conscience, and to acquit or condemn Sinners in the Sight of God!

It is thus then that the Apostles remitted and retained Sins, *viz* by declaring that Law by Authority from Christ, upon the Observance or Contempt of which Sinners should be either justified or condemned at the Day of Judgment. By a very common Figure
of

of Speech THEY are said to do, what HE did BY THEM as his REPRESENTATIVES. And this (principally) I take to be that Power which our Saviour in his Life-time, promised to St. Peter and to the rest of the Apostles, when he said, *I will give unto thee the Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt bind on Earth shall be bound in Heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt loose on Earth shall be loosed in Heaven.* Matt. xvi. 19. Binding and loosing hath the same Sense with *remitting* and *retaining*; and the Meaning is, that what they by Christs Authority should declare to be the Law of Remission, God would ratify in the same Manner as if HE had declared it himself*. And this is a Power which none but the Apostles of Christ could pre-

* I say that this is (principally) the Power of the Keys, because in the 18th Chapter of this Gospel, Verse 18. the Expression of *binding* and *loosing*, is applied to the Power of admitting Men to, and excluding them from, the visible Communion of the Church. But nothing hinders but that the Power of the Keys may comprehend two distinct Powers; one peculiar to the Apostles; the other common to them and to all the succeeding Governours of the Church (of which hereafter) and I conceive it will be best so explained.

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tend to, because they only had the SEAL of his Authority. The ordinary Ministers of Christ are separated to their ministerial Function by Authority from Christ, who hath appointed divers Orders of Men in his Church; but they cannot declare what is the Law of Salvation, *by his Authority*; for they have not the SEAL of it as the Apostles had. They may publish or preach (and by their Office they are *bound* to preach) the Law of Salvation as Christ and his Apostles left it. But in this they stand in the Rank of *Instructors* not of *authorized Messengers*. When Christ or his Apostles, (under the full Manifestation of the divine Presence with them) said *This do and thou shalt live*; there were no more Questions to be asked. Their *Word* was sufficient. But when an ordinary Minister of the Church tells me *this is the Law of Salvation*, he must be able to shew me that Law in his Bible, or I neither will nor ought to believe it.

I have given you my free Thoughts upon this much controverted Passage of St. *John*; and if this be admitted the popish Doctrine of Confession and Absolution

solution will be clean shut out. As the Interpretation is easy and natural it is so much the more likely to be the true one; and as such I shall leave it with you.

If there are any (and such there may be) who think that these Words concern the Ministers of the Church in all Ages as well as the Apostles, and that the Absolution of a Priest when rightly administred hath a *real Effect* to justify Sinners in the Sight of God; let him consider with himself what that Effect is or *can be*. No Man will say that the Absolution of a Priest conveys Remission, seperately from the Consideration of all Qualifications on the Part of the Offender. Even the Church of Rome does not go so far. Suppose then a Sinner qualified for Forgiveness in all Respects with this single Exception, that he has not received, nor intends or desires to receive Absolution from a Priest; is he, merely for the want of Absolution, in a State of Condemnation? No Protestant will say this; and if a Papist says it (as say it he *must* upon his own Principles) he must shew some Law of God which

which says so too, or it avails nothing, If God had appointed Confession and Absolution as a Means necessary to Salvation, as he hath appointed Baptism and the Lord's Supper; the wilful Neglect or Contempt of them would have been setting God's Authority at nought, and a just Impeachment of our Qualifications in other Respects. But there is no such Appointment as this to be found in Scripture, whatever the Church of *Rome* may pretend to; and it is absurd to suppose that there should be any such Appointment; because it refers the Priest to a Matter in which he is an incompetent judge. In the other two Cases it is not so. When a Priest administers Baptism or the holy Communion, he knows both what he does, and why, and with what Effect he does it. He administers an external Ordinance to an external Effect, which, in the one Case, is receiving a Person as a Member of the visible Church of Christ; in the other, declaring that he holds Christian-Fellowship with him as such. Here his Office ends; for as to Conscience he hath nothing to do with it, nor pretends to

have

have any thing to do with it. The Conscience of the *Receiver* is concerned in these Things, as it depends upon the State of his Conscience whether the use of these Means shall or shall not be available to his Salvation. But concerning this the Priest declareth nothing, he judgeth nothing, but leaves it to God the Judge of Conscience. But in Absolution the Priest enters directly into the Judgment of Conscience, and places himself in the Seat of God, whilst he has all the Weaknesses and Imperfections of a Man, and knows not whether the Sentence he pronounces be right or wrong! Could God be the Author of such an Institution as this? To what Use can it serve? Can the Judgment of a Man, *direct* the Judgment of God? Or will God *confirm* a Sentence which the Priest wrongfully pronounces? No; nor will he (as we say) for want of such Sentence condemn a Man whom he sees qualified for Salvation by the Terms of the Gospel, into which (as we have seen) the Obligation to confess and be absolved does not enter. Let any Man tell me

me then what Sort of *Effect* that must be, which, if the Sentence be wrong it will do him no good, and, the want of which, if he be otherwise rightly qualified, will do him no harm!

ALL this is plain enough to common Sense. But it is hard to get rid of inbred Prejudices; and to this, I think, we must ascribe the Respect that is paid to private Confession and Absolution in the Liturgy of our Church. What precise Notions our Reformers had of this Matter, it may be hard to say; but this is certain, that when the Reformation first set out, there was great Difference of Opinion concerning it: For whilst some looked upon it as an insignificant Thing, others laid great Stress upon it; which made it a very tender Point to meddle with. Our Reformers saw the Danger of making it necessary to Salvation, and have avoided it. They saw the Value and Necessity of Repentance, and have very strongly inculcated it. But they did not absolutely declare against the Use of private Confession and Absolution, but left it open to those who

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who could not * otherwise satisfy their Consciences; thinking it better, perhaps, to *manage*, what they could not, without Danger, attempt to *cure*. This, however, was taking Care of the *essential* Points; for whilst every Man was left to his Liberty, whether to use private Confession or not; and the People were taught, that without true Repentance Absolution was of no Value; they might be left to speculate upon its *internal Operations*, without any Hazard to their Salvation. But the Church of *Rome* hath erred in both these Points; first, in making the Absolution of a Priest necessary to Salvation, as I have shewn already; and next, in so explaining its Efficacy as to shut out the Necessity of Repentance and a new Life. This remains yet to be proved; and I shall take the Proof of it from the Council of *Trent*, which having laid down Contrition as a Qualification necessary in order to Absolution describes it thus.

“ CONTRITION is a Sorrow of Mind
“ for, and an Abhorrence of, Sins past,

* See the Exhortation to the Communion, and the Rubrick in the Visitation of the Sick.

“ together with a Purpose not to of-
 “ fend for the Time to come. It is
 “ not only a ceasing from Sin, and the
 “ Purpose and Beginning of a new
 “ Life, but also a Hatred of our past
 “ Conduct, according to that of Eze-
 “ kiel, Chap. xviii. Verse 31. *Cast away*
 “ *from you all your Transgressions whereby*
 “ *ye have transgressed, and make you a new*
 “ *Heart and a new Spirit.* And cer-
 “ tainly [proceeds the Synod] who
 “ ever considers those Lamentations of
 holy Men,——*Against thee only have I*
 “ *sinned and done this Evil,——I am*
 “ *weary of my groaning, all the Night*
 “ *make I my Bed to swim,——*and the
 “ like; cannot fail to understand that
 “ they proceeded from a vehement
 “ Hatred of their past Lives, and De-
 “ testation of their Sins”. * All this
 looks well; and would lead one to
 hope, that (since all Sacraments loose
 their salutary Effect when there is a Fai-
 lure in any one essential Qualification
 in the Receiver) if a Person should re-
 ceive Absolution from a Priest, and was
 not truly penitent, it should avail him

* Conc. Trid. Ibid. Cap. 4.

nothing. But the latter Part of this very Canon spoils all. For there it is said of ATTRITION, (or a lame, imperfect Repentance) that "Though it will not justify a Man *without* the Sacrament, yet it disposes [or qualifies] him to obtain the Grace of God in [or by] the Sacrament; PROVIDED it excludes the Will [or Purpose] of sinning". Which is as much as to say, that though a Man *not* contrite, cannot be justified *without* Absolution, yet *with* it he *may*. This Doctrine is supported by Bellarmine, who says, (if I understand him) that "ATTRITION, though *alone*, or *by itself* it will not justify is yet SUFFICIENT WITH ABSOLUTION"*; and quotes the Canon of Trent for this Purpose. But it is very hard to understand how Contrition should be necessary to qualify a Man for Absolution, if any thing *short* of Contrition (which *Attrition* is manifestly supposed to be) *with* Absolution will do as well; unless you are willing to accept of the learned Cardinal's Solution of this Difficulty, which is that "*Attrition*, by

* De Pœnit. Lib. 2 Cap. 18. *in fine*.

“Virtue of the Absolution of the
 “Priest BECOMES *Contrition*”. When you
 have swallowed the Doctrine of Tran-
 substantiation, you will be prepared for
 this : For he that has Power to convert
 Bread and Wine into Flesh and Blood,
 may with equal Ease change any thing
 into any thing. In the mean while it
 is evident, that notwithstanding the
 Pomp of Words with which the Coun-
 cil of *Trent* hath set forth Contrition,
 the true, plain, Doctrine of Popery is
 that *with* Absolution a very slight, su-
 perficial Sorrow for Sin, without any
 Amendment of Life, will suffice for the
 Remission of Sin, unless a Man be so
 desperately bad as to entertain the Will
 or Purpose of Sinning, at the very
 Time that he is making Confession to a
 Priest ! And how long is this Remedy
 to serve ? Why, *for ever* ; for the Coun-
 cil expressly says, that “ Christ has
 “ appointed Sinners to resort to this
 “ Tribunal, that by the Sentence of the
 “ Priest they may be delivered from
 “ their Sins, not ONCE, but so OFTEN
 “ as they shall think fit to have Re-
 “ course

"course to this Remedy". * For Instance; a Man sins to-day; and to-morrow goes to a Priest. Absolution sets all right. He sins again, and confesses again. The Effect will for ever be the same. Every Act of Confession and Absolution cancels all past Debts, and puts a Man, as it were, upon the Beginning of a new Scene. This, no doubt, is a very comfortable Doctrine for Sinners. But it is too comfortable to be true. For, at this Rate, who will take any Care to mend his Manners? Those who read their Bibles will see that the Repentance, to which the Gospel annexes the Remission of Sin, is not determined by any one transient Act, but by a constant permanent State of the Mind habitually changed from Evil to Good; and any one's common Sense will tell him, that nothing less than this can, or ought to, serve. So that here is a Doctrine which utterly subverts the very End and Design of the Gospel, and leaves an open Gap to all Kinds of Wickedness. Look into the Practices of the Members of that Communion,

* Ibid. Cap. 2.

and you will find them corresponding. *There* you may see Men of the most profligate Lives resorting as regularly to Confession as they go to Bed, or sit down to their common Meals. It is but too frequent in all Communion for Men to act inconsistently with their Professions, even against the repeated Admonitions of those who are *set over them in the Lord*. But vicious Practices must needs grow up to a prodigious Encrease, when they have the publick Authority of the Church to warm and cherish them.

It may now be proper to pause a little, and consider from what Source all this Corruption sprang. Most bad Things take their Rise from something originally good, which in the Course of Time taking in foreign Mixtures changes its Nature, and becomes another Thing. The popish Saint-Worship is the Corruption of that pious Regard, which was paid to the Memories of those holy Men, who sealed the Faith with their Blood. And their Sacrament of Penance is, in like manner, the Corruption of that true, and salutary Discipline,

cipline, which was established in the Church by Christ and his Apostles. Man cannot judge the Heart of Man, but Man can judge of the outward Behaviour, and according to this Rule the Apostles proceeded in the gathering and in the Government of the Church. Those who came to them professing their Faith, and desiring to be received by Baptism, were admitted; and those, who after Baptism, became by their disorderly Lives a Shame to their Profession, they turned out of the Church. This was founded upon our Saviour's Rule. Matt. xviii. 15—18. *If thy Brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his Fault between thee and him. If he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy Brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the Mouth of two or three Witnesses every Word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the Church: But if he neglect to hear the Church, let him be unto thee as a heathen Man and a Publican.* We see here, that in Case of Offence, the Offender was first of all privately to be admonished. If that would not bring

him to a proper Sense of himself; the Admonition was to be repeated in the Presence of two or three Witnesses. If this would not do, he was to be convened before the Church, against whose Admonition if he obstinately persisted, he was to be *excommunicated*, that is, to be *expelled* from the Society of Christians, and treated as if he were *a heathen Man and a Publican*; in which State he was to remain till he had given the proper Evidence of his Repentance, then to be restored to his former Privilege.

THIS is that *second* Branch of Authority (comprehended under the *general* Name of the *Power of the Keys*) which Christ gave to his Apostles; and which was not peculiar to them (as the first was) but common to them, and to all succeeding Governours of the Church. For, to this Discipline we find *St. Paul* directing the Church at *Corinth*, upon Information that some one among them had committed *Incest* in marrying *his Father's Wife*; whom he orders to be *taken away from among them*, and, upon this Occasion, lays it down as a general Rule,

Rule, that if any Man that is called a Brother be a Fornicator, or covetous, or an Idolater, or a Railer, or a Drunkard, or an Extortioner, they should not keep Company with him, no not so much as to eat. 1 Cor. v. In his second Epistle we find him giving Directions, that the same Person (it seems) whom they had excommunicated upon the Receipt of his first, should be again restored; upon Satisfaction received (no Doubt) of his Repentance; for he is represented as in Danger of being swallowed up with over-much Sorrow. 2 Cor. ii. 7. This Discipline Christ established, the Apostles exercised, and the Church practiced for several hundreds of Years, till (in the later Ages) the popish Discipline thrust it out, and slipt into its Place. But you will observe, that all this has nothing to do with Conscience. They put Men out of the visible Communion of the Church; and they received them back again as they saw Cause: But they did not understand or pretend, that by shutting a Man out of the Church, they shut him out of the Kingdom of Heaven. They bound and they loosed, they remit-

ted and they *retained* with respect to the OUTWARD PRIVILEGES of Christian Fellowship; but as to the State of Mens Consciences before God, with respect to the Judgment of the great Day, it is a Point they never meddled with, but confessed (as they had great Reason to confess) that they were utterly unqualified for it. There are several Writers within the first 500 Years, that speak home to this Purpose, and shew it to have been the settled Doctrine of those Times (as it was in the Age of Christ and his Apostles) that GOD ALONE hath Power to forgive Sins. *Irenæus* argues *Christ* to be *God*, because he said to the Man sick of the Palsy, *thy Sins be forgiven thee*. *Clemens* of *Alexandria* directly asserts, that "CHRIST ALONE is able " to forgive our Sins, HE ALONE being " able to discern the Sincerity or the " Insincerity of our Obedience". The Writer of the Life of *Basil* relates, that a Woman of Quality who had been a great Sinner came to *Basil*, that she might, through his Means, obtain Pardon. To whom the good Man replied, "Dost thou know that NONE can forgive
" give

“ give Sins but GOD ONLY ? To which she readily answered, “ I do know it, “ and therefore I am come to engage “ thy *Intercession* with God for me”. You see what Place (according to the Doctrine of those Times) the Clergy had in the Business of reconciling Sinners to God. It was not (as it is now in the Church of *Rome*) to pronounce a *judicial Sentence* of Absolution; but to assist them with their *Prayers* to obtain Forgiveness. Upon this latter the ancient Church always insisted much; and with just Reason, for it has the Scripture Warrant to support it. Our Saviour says, (*Matt. xviii. 19, 20*) *If two of you shall agree on Earth, as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in Heaven. For when two or three are gathered together in my Name, there am I in the midst of them;* which (in effect) the Evangelist has applied to this very Case, by subjoining these Words to our Saviour’s Grant of the Power of Discipline. But *St. James* is express, Chap. v. Verse 16. *Confess your Faults one to another, and pray one for another that ye may be healed.*

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The effectual fervent Prayer of a righteous Man availeth much. This should teach us, (and I shall shew it you more fully hereafter) that the Prayers of the Church are not so contemptible a Thing as in these Times they are grown (too generally) to be esteemed: But to convince you farther, how little Concern the SENTENCE of the Church was thought to have in those Times with the *Consciences* of Sinners, and their Acquittal or Condemnation *before God*, let it be observed, that even the *Montanists* and the *Novatians* (who were the most rigid of all) though they absolutely refused Communion to some Sorts of Offenders, yet they did not suppose them thereby shut out from the Mercies of God; but exhorted them to exercise themselves in the Works of Repentance, that they might obtain Pardon from God in the next World, though they did not think them qualified to obtain the Peace of the Church in this.

UPON th's Foot we shall be able to talk sensibly upon the Authority of Absolution. For the Act of the Church, in declaring a Man admitted to, or excluded from her Communion, is as much

much an Act of Authority, as the Sentence of the Judge upon the Bench in any of the King's Courts, and hath a corresponding Effect. For as the Sentence of a Judge determines a Man's State with respect to the *civil* Society, so the Sentence of the Church determines his State with respect to the *religious* Society, of which he is a Member. But if the Church goes farther, and pretends by her Sentence to determine a Man's State, as it lies between God and his own Conscience, it is no Act of Authority, nor can it have any Effect, any more than the Sentence of a Judge will have Effect, when he meddles in Matters that the Law has not placed within his Cognisance. And is it not much better to own this, than to grasp at the Shadow of an Authority, which in Truth and Substance we must all of us renounce? What else do we when we pretend to absolve Conscience? We may use a hundred Distinctions, if we please. We may say that the Absolution is not *authoritative* but *declaratory*; or that it is not *judicial* but *ministerial*. But if you would speak to be understood, you must say that with respect to any real; internal Effect, it is

NOTHING; and you will speak Truth too: For all the rest, if you would preserve to God his Prerogative to forgive Sin, are Words without Meaning.

BUT to proceed, — Having explained to you what was the true Discipline settled by Christ and his Apostles; let us next see how and by what Steps it grew into Disuse. Christ and his Apostles settled this Discipline in the Gross; but there being no Ritual set down in Scripture, their Successors, in the future Ages of the Church, were, in the *Manner* of exercising it, left to their *Discretion* (and of course to their *Indiscretion* too) by which means much Superstition soon arose. The *Apostolical Constitutions* (as they are called) are a mixed interpolated Work, which was not known in any Form till the fourth Century; but which contains Matters of a much higher Date; and *there* you will find the following Directions given to the Bishop. “When
 “ you see the Offender in the Congregation, you are to take the Matter
 “ heavily, and to give Orders that he
 “ be expelled from it. Upon this Expulsion the Deacons are likewise to

“ ex-

“ exprefs their Concern ; to follow and
 “ to find the Party, and to detain him
 “ for a while without the Church. In
 “ a little Time they are to come back,
 “ and to interceed with you on his Be-
 “ half——then you shall order him to
 “ be brought into the Church ; and
 “ after having examined whether he be
 “ truly penitent, and fit to be re-ad-
 “ mitted into full Communion, you
 “ shall direct him to continue in a State
 “ of Mortification for the Space of two,
 “ three, five or seven Weeks, accord-
 “ ing to the Nature of the Offence,
 “ and then, after some proper Ad-
 “ monitions, shall dismiss [or ab-
 “ solve] him”. I cannot help thinking
 that there is something in this which
 hath very much the Air of a *Farce*.
 Something there is too which looks to
 be Apostolical ; I mean the *Period* of
 the Penance, which, originally, was but
 short, in comparison to what we find it
 in after Ages. For the *incestuous* Person,
 whom *St. Paul* directed to be excom-
 municated, was kept in his State of Pro-
 bation for no longer Time, than what
 had passed between the Writing of his
 first and his second Epistle to the Church

at *Corinth*, which (probably) was not more than a Year. But look down lower, beyond the Middle of the third Century, and instead of two, three, five or seven *Weeks*, you will find the Period of Penance extended to as many *Years*. And what were the Penitents to do all the while? Why they were to pass through several Stations, or Stages of Discipline. They were “to set in Sack-
 “cloth covered with Ashes; to neglect all Dress and Ornament; to afflict their Souls with melancholly
 “Meditations; to use neither Meat nor
 “Drink for Pleasure, but merely for
 “Sustenance; to groan and weep and
 “cry unto God both Night and Day;
 “to prostrate themselves before the
 “Clergy and People, and lay down
 “their Necks to be trodden on, begging
 “of them, in the humblest Manner,
 “that they would interceed for them,
 “&c”. Now, though it is certainly very fit and necessary, in such Cases, that Men should give the proper Evidence of their Repentance, by using great Reserve in their Behaviour, and by a more than ordinary Attention to Prayer.

Prayer and other Acts of Piety and Devotion; and though I doubt not but reasonable Severities of this Sort were required by the Apostles themselves; yet (with great Submission be it spoken) I think that the keeping Men, for Years together, in such a State as is fit to turn their Brains and make them mad, was straining the String too far, and this, at last, was that which broke it. For though it might be tolerable in the Ages of Persecution, when the Zeal of Christians was warm and strong; it would not do, when, after the Conversion of the Empire, the Church began to grow fat and wanton, which naturally would (as in fact it did) dispose them to kick at Discipline and break those Bonds which galled them too heavily.

THAT which made the first opening to this Revolt, was an Accident which arose from a Custom which had been long in Use, viz. the admitting those who had been guilty of no publick Offence, upon the Confession of their *secret* Sins, to perform publick Penance, and go through the same Stages of Discipline that publick Offenders did. This Custom

Custom was at least as old as *Origen*, who lived in the Middle of the third Century, and has a Passage to this Effect, “As they who are troubled with Indigestion, and have any Thing within them that oppresses the Stomach, are relieved by vomiting; so Sinners who conceal their Practices, and retain them within their own Breast, feel in themselves an inward Disquietude, and are almost choked with the Matter which they thus suppress; but by Confession and Self-accusation, they discharge themselves of their Burden.” Therefore his Advice is, that, in such Cases, Men “would chuse some fit Person to whom they may open their Minds—that so, if he shall judge their Case to be what may *need the Cure of a publick Animadversion*, and deserve to be *laid open in the Face of the Church* for the Edification either of themselves or others, this may be done deliberately and discreetly”, &c.

Let me remark upon this Passage by the Way, that it makes nothing at all for secret Confessions as they are now practiced in the Church of *Rome*. For,

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in the first Place, these Confessions are not urged as a Matter of Necessity to all Christians, but as prudent in certain Cases, when the Conscience was oppressed and burdened with Sin. Such Confessions as these our Church recommends, and the Practice of all Ages warrants. In the next Place, the Use of these Confessions was not to obtain private Absolution from a Priest (a Practice not known or thought of till some Centuries after) but to take Advice whether it were best to leave the Issue to private Humiliation; or to submit to, and put themselves under, the publick Penance of the Church. But with all due Submission to the high Antiquity of this Practice; I must take leave to be of Opinion, that the putting Men under publick Penance for *secret* Sins was a *Departure* from the original Discipline as settled by Christ and his Apostles. Our Saviour's Direction manifestly relates to *known* and not to *secret* Offences; the Persons excommunicated by St. Paul were *all* notorious Offenders; and the Rule he gives about Excommunication, relates to Sins *open* and *scandalous* and to none else.

Nor

Nor have we the least Hint or Intimation in Scripture of *secret* Sins as the proper Object of the publick Discipline. And in common Sense ; if the Church knows nothing of Mens Sins, what *can* the Church have to do with them? When Sins are notorious there is Reason good that the Congregation, to whom the Offence is given, should receive Satisfaction of the Sinner's Repentance ; otherwise visible Communion cannot stand. But secret Sins *can* give no publick Offence ; and where no Offence is given there is no Satisfaction due. It hath, indeed, a great Appearance of Self-abasement, when Men voluntarily offer to take Shame to themselves ; and this was the Thing that recommended this Practice. But on the other Hand, no one will pretend to say that multiplying bad Examples is not a dangerous Thing, or that this Practice did not multiply bad Examples. For though the Sins privately confessed were not *always* laid open in the Face of the Church, and you would see People standing in the Rank of Penitents, nobody, but the Confessor, knowing *why* ; yet the
very

very submitting to publick Penance was a Declaration, as strong as could be, that there was *some* Sin at bottom, and a *great* Sin it would naturally be presumed to be, since their private Repentance was not thought a sufficient Cure for it. As Circumstances may be put, it had been better that the Sin had been published, than left to every Man's Conjecture what it was; for Men are generally more prone to think the worst of their Neighbours, than to take the charitable Side.

THAT Scandals had been given by the divulging of Sins that had better have been kept secret, we may fairly conclude from the Appointment of a new Officer in the Church, called the *penitentiary Priest*, whose Business it was to superintend the Affair of private Confessions, and give Directions to Penitents what Sins were fit to be submitted to publick Penance, and how they were to conduct themselves in the Performance of it. This Office was set up under the *Decian* Persecution, about the Middle of the third Century; and was thought a safer Way than to leave every one to chuse his own Confessor, of whose Prudence

dence the Church could have no Security. But this Remedy did not cure the Evil. Scandal was given, and (as it may very well be supposed) not unfrequently, till the Accident above hinted at happening at *Constantinople*, towards the Close of the fourth Century, gave Occasion to *Nectarius* Bishop of the Place, to abolish the Penitentiary's Office. The Case was this;

“ A CERTAIN Gentlewoman coming
“ to the penitentiary Priest, made particular Confession of her Sins that she
“ had committed after Baptism. The
“ Priest gave her such Directions as he
“ thought proper; and whilst she was
“ proceeding in the Course of her Pen-
“ ance, she accused herself of *another*
“ Sin, for she confessed that one of the
“ Deacons of the Church had had *criminal*
“ Conversation with her”. See now
what it is to meddle with secret Sins!
whilst they are secret they may corrupt
the Priest. If they are published they
may help to corrupt the People. What
the Deacon knew of this Woman's
Crimes the History does not inform us.
But he saw that she had been a bad
Liver,

Liver, and was therefore the more fit for his Purpose. May we not, without Breach of Charity, suppose such Cases in the Church of *Rome*? The Matter, however, was soon blazed abroad. The Deacon was excommunicated; and the whole City scandalized, when such Wickedness was committed by Men whose Function was Sacred, and (perhaps) in sacred Places too. This it was that induced *Nectarius* to abolish the Office of *Penitentiaries*, and (as the Words of the old Historian are) to “leave it “to every Man’s Liberty, to partake “of the holy Mysteries [that is of the “Eucharist] according to the Direction “of his own Conscience”. This Example was followed by almost all the Bishops of the East, though, in the West the Office was continued for some time longer.

WE have here then incontestable Evidence that for the first 400 Years, the Confession of secret Sins was not look’d upon by the catholick Church as a Duty upon all Men by *divine Right*, but as an *ecclesiastical* Usage that might be continued or abrogated as Circumstances

stances should persuade. It is not to be supposed that *Nectarius* would have abolished this Office, or that the eastern Bishops would so unanimously have concurred with him in it, if this had been a single Case; and therefore (as I said just now) it is reasonable to think that Scandals of this Sort were not very uncommon. However this was, the Office was in Fact laid aside; and from this Time forward we shall find the Fathers of the Church, instead of extolling the Piety of these voluntary Confessions (which had been the Manner of some of their Predecessors) taking Pains to bring them into disesteem. *Chrysostom* succeeded *Nectarius* in the See of *Constantinople*; and what says he? “I bid thee not to
 “bring thyself upon the Stage, nor to
 “accuse thyself unto others; but I advise thee to observe the Prophet’s Direction, *reveal thy Way unto the Lord*;
 “confess thy Sins before God; confess them before thy Judge”. Again;
 “It is not necessary that thou confess
 “thy Sins in the Presence of Witnesses;
 “let the Enquiry after thy Sins be made
 “in thy own Thoughts, let God only
 “only

“ see thee confessing”. Once more; “ I
 “ do not bring thee into the Theatre
 “ of thy Fellow-Servants, neither do I
 “ constrain thee by any Necessity to
 “ discover thy Sin unto Men. Unfold
 “ thy Conscience before God, and shew
 “ him thy Wounds, and ask the Cure
 “ of Him”. Other Passages to the
 same Import might be produced from
Basil, from *Hilary*, from *Ambrose*, &c.—
 But it is a well known Case.

This Change, in so material a Part
 of the Discipline (as *Custom* had made
 it) meeting with the growing Corrup-
 tion of the Times, prepared the Way
 for a Change in the rest. For the People
 being now taught that private Humi-
 liation and Repentance would do for
 secret Sins, began to think that it would
 do for publick ones too. The Clergy,
 however, pressed the Use of publick
 Penance for notorious Sins as much as
 they could, and with great Difficulty
 kept the Discipline alive for a Century
 or two, but under great and visible De-
 cays. Till at last finding the Stream
 too strong for them (and growing, pro-
 bably, as much corrupted themselves as

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the People were) they began to turn their Thoughts to softer Measures; and private Confessions, private Penances, and private Absolutions were admitted instead of the publick ones; much in the same Sort as (to take an Example from among ourselves) in some Places, and with some Sort of Persons, private Christnings, and private Churchings, have thrust out the publick Use of those Offices.

THUS was that goodly Order which Christ and his Apostles appointed for the Correction of Offenders utterly dissolved and changed into another Thing; partly by the intemperate Zeal and Indiscretion of the Clergy, and partly through the Prevalency of Vice among the Laity, which grew up to that Heighth, that Men would not either *endure sound Doctrine*, or submit to wholesome Discipline. And when once Discipline came to be a private Transaction between the Priest and the Sinner, and stood quite detached from all *publick Effect*; that it might not seem to be a mere *Nothing*, the *internal Effect* of *Absolution* upon *Conscience* was, probably, thought

thought of. When it was that this Notion began to shew itself, the Darknes of those Times will not allow us to settle with any Exactness, nor is it material that we should. One Thing is certain, that till after the first thousand Years, the Forms of Absolution ran all in the Form of a Prayer, and not in the Form of a peremptory definitive Sentence, as it now stands in the popish Forms, and in one of our own Forms, from them. How this Form came to be retained in our Church, I have already hinted; and for the same Reasons it is likely, the popish Form of ordaining Priests, was also retained. These two Forms are relative to each other; and cannot stand separately. For the one conveys the Power which the other exerciseth. And they are Novelties alike. The ancient Manner of ordaining Priests was by Imposition of Hands and Prayer; but in the twelfth Century the present Form was slipt into the Ritual, in the very Words which our Saviour made use of when he sent forth his Apostles as authorized Messengers to preach the Gospel; *Receive ye the Holy Ghost; whatsoever Sins ye remit*

mit they are remitted unto them ; and who-
soever Sins ye retain they are retained. There
is no Harm in the Use of these Words,
provided they be used in a qualified
Sense ; and a *very* qualified Sense it
must be. But the Thing most to be
wished, with respect to both these Forms,
is, that they were *properly* altered. Dis-
senters would find less Matter for Cen-
sure ; and Infidels for * profane Ral-
lery.

THAT I may not appear singular in
my Opinion with respect to the Form
of Absolution, as it stands in our Office
for the Visitation of the Sick (for of
this it is that I am now speaking) give
me leave to observe to you, that the late
Bishop *Bull*, who was one of the ablest
Scholars, the staunchest Churchmen, and
the best Christians of his Time, when he
was upon his Death-bed, refused to have
this Form read ; and ordered the Minister
that attended him to use that Form
which stands in the Office for the holy
Communion in its stead ; which is in-
deed a most excellent Form of Prayer,
truly primitive, and as such should be

* See Lord *Bolingbroke's* Letter to Mr. *Pope*.

recommended to all Christians on such Occasions. For though it is no Part of the Priests Business to pass Sentence upon the Sinner ; it is his Business to hear the Confessions of those who are willing to open to him the State of their Consciences, and to join with them in Prayer to God that their Sins may be forgiven.

THE † Writer of his Life, who gives us this Account, though he hath shewn a manifest Partiality to the Sentiments of his own Party, is yet so ingenuous as to confess, that the Form chosen by the Bishop is *not liable to Exception* as the other is, and that he had a *Right* to make use of it. A Right he had no doubt ; and so has every body else ; and a Right it is perfectly consistent with the Respect due to the Order of the Church ; which *permits* the Use of the other Form to those who *heartily desire it*, but *binds* it upon none. I believe there are few in these Days that would desire the Use of this Form. I have been a Parish Minister now upwards of forty Years, and was never once called to the Use of it.

† Mr. Nelson.

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Time

Time has worn out those Prejudices which made the *Indulgence* of it necessary at first: I wish it had not also worn out some better Things.

To return now from this Digression to our principal Subject. We have seen publick Confessions, publick Penance, and publick Absolutions, turned into private Ones: In short, the whole Discipline of the Church, which at first was relative only to the external Policy of the Church considered as a visible Society (in which it had a visible Effect) changed into an Instrument operating (as is vainly imagined) upon Conscience and its State with respect to the invisible World. Of Confession and Absolution enough has been said. Let us next consider the Article of *Penance*; concerning which there are two general Circumstances that it will be proper to take Notice of, to shew you how thoroughly the Church of *Rome* hath departed from the ancient Pattern. The first is, that whereas in the ancient Church there was but one Penance (as there is but one Baptism) the Church of *Rome* admits a Man to Penance, so often as he shall confess in order to receive Ab-

Absolution, which is as often as he shall think it needful. The Reason of the Difference is visible, and arises from the Change made in the Nature of the Discipline. The ancient Church judged (and rightly judged) that it was inconsistent with the Nature of the Church, considered as a visible Society, to hold Communion with notorious Sinners till they had given the proper Evidence of their Repentance; which Evidence the Penance ordered and performed was *presumed* to be. But if after the Penance performed, the Persons relapsed into the same Sins, or committed as bad or worse, the *Ground* of this Presumption *ceased*. The Man discredited his own Evidence; and they would not admit him to Penance a second Time; but treated him as one not fit to be trusted. In like manner as in civil Societies, if a Man should be guilty of Treason against the State, and upon his Submission be once pardoned; it would not (ordinarily at least) be thought prudent or safe, upon a second Offence, to treat him with the same Clemency. But the Penance of the Church of *Rome* having

no Relation to the Church as a publick Society, but being a secret Affair between the Priest and the Sinner to cure his Conscience, they take a proportionable Liberty, and admit him to Penance so often as his Conscience wants curing. And if the Priest *could* do all that he *pretends* to do; it must be granted that they act a very *compassionate* Part; how *reasonable* a one there may be yet Room to question.

THE next Thing to be taken Notice of is, that whereas, anciently, (a few Cases excepted) the Church always required the Penance to be performed *before* Absolution was given; the Church of *Rome* gives Absolution immediately upon Confession, and *trusts* for the Penance to be performed afterwards. And what if the Penance never be performed? Will God rescind his own Sentence? Will the Man who (as *they* say) was *before* justified by the Absolution of the Priest be again unjustified? This is a Question fit only for popish Casuists to meddle with; and to such I leave it.

BUT after all, what is this Penance? What it was in the ancient Church you have

have heard already. It was long and severe. More severe perhaps, in some Respects, than it ought to have been. But the Church of *Rome* has taken Care to make the Burden light enough. You must say over so many Prayers; which you may do at a Card-Table, with as good Effect as elsewhere. Or; you must give so much Alms; you must fast so many Days; you must submit to such or such Acts of Mortification. All this is to be done by way of *Compensation* or *Satisfaction*, as they are pleased to call it; and it matters not whether there be one Grain of Religion at bottom, provided the Work be but done; or if there is any Part of it that you do not like, it may be bought off (perhaps) by so much Money. Now *to whom* is this *Satisfaction* supposed to be made? To God you may be sure; between whom and the Priest the Affair is transacted. But is there, or can there be a more detestable Traffick than this! Prayer, and Fasting, and Alms, are acceptable to God, when they are considered as the Works of true Repentance. But to treat them as *Attonements* for Sin (which is plainly the popish No-

tion) is an Affront to God, and a Scandal upon his holy Word, which knows of but *one* Attonement for Sin, the Blood of Jesus Christ.

HERE is however, you see, a very easy Road laid out for Sinners to get to Heaven, if you can be prevailed upon to try it. But O! my Friends! How sad will be the Disappointment, at the great Day of Accounts, when all this *Incrustation*; this *Caseling*; this *daubing with untempered Mortar*, shall drop off at once, and our Souls shall stand naked, deformed, and filthy, before the Face of that great and terrible Judge, into whose Presence no unclean Thing shall enter! Speak; tell me; which would you chuse? The Physican who will lay open your Sores, and apply wholesome and salutary, tho' sharp and painful Remedies; or him who will skin them over, and use Palliatives to make you not feel your Pain, but leaves the Cause untouched, that will work your Destruction! I know your Choice. You need not tell me. You had rather suffer Pain awhile than die. But what is this Death, to avoid which you would chuse to suffer Pain? It is the Death of the Body, and

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and of the Body only, which you may, if you please, put your self into a Condition not to fear; for it is the Entrance upon a new and a better Life, to those who shall be found qualified for it. But the Death to which all these false Supports; all this spiritual Quackery, will bring us; is the Death of the Soul; which hath no new Life to succeed it; but hath its full and final Period in the eternal Wrath of God.

I SHALL close the Subject with this short Advice. *Trust not to Vanity and lying Divinations; but work out your own Salvation with Fear and trembling.* Go not to a Priest for what the Gospel puts into your own Hands. You have Christ's Promise, That if you have Faith and true Repentance, you shall be saved. This you may trust to. If you trust to any Thing else, you *lean upon a broken Reed that will go into your Hand and pierce it.*

I AM now got through the principal Errors of the Church of *Rome*. I call them *principal* because they affect our principal Interest, the Salvation of our Souls. By setting up a false, idolatrous
Worship,

60 *Popery a trading Religion.*

Worship, they betray us into Sin; and by proposing a false Method of Reconciliation when we have sinned, they lead us from the true one, and leave us under the Sentence of the Law. But it is fit, that after this you should just have a Sight, of the *trading* Doctrines of the Church of *Rome*; the *mercantile* Part of their Religion (as we may call it) by which they cheat you of your Money. St. Paul speaks of *Men of corrupted Minds, and destitute of the Truth, who supposed that Gain was Godliness.* 1 Tim. vi. 5. That is who turned Religion into a Trade. St. Peter likewise complains of some *who through Covetousness with feigned Words made Merchandize of the People.* 2 Pet. ii. 3. This it is to turn Religion into a Trade; not, when speaking the Words of Truth and Soberness, Men receive the honourable Rewards of a painful Ministry (*for the Labourer is worthy of his Hire*) but, when by Falshood and Fraud, under the Mask of Religion, they make Gain to themselves. Such were those of whom St. Peter speaks; and these were they, of whose coming he prophesies at the first
Verse

Verse of this Chapter; *False Teachers, who privily should bring in damnable Heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them.* The learned Mr. Mede does not scruple to set down this, as another illustrious Prophecy of the popish Apostacy, upon such Grounds as these. In the first Place; these Teachers of *damnable Heresies*, were to make no small Figure in the World. They were to draw an Abundance of Disciples after them. *MANY shall follow their pernicious Ways, by reason of whom the Way of Truth shall be evil spoken of.* Verse 2. Heresies there were in the Apostles Times; but their Leaders were but a few, and those Men of no Credit in the Church, which renounced them as soon as they were discovered. But the Time, it seems, was coming, when the Church should generally be infected with poisonous Doctrines, to the great Discredit of the Gospel and its Author. So much the Words seem to imply. In the next Place; these *damnable Heresies*, are the Doctrines of Dæmons or of Idol-Worship; for the Teachers of them are compared to the *false Prophets* under the Law,

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who were always Teachers of Idolatry, and are noted in the Old Testament with no other Heresy than this. Let me add; this Idol-Worship among Christians (or these *damnable Heresies*) is called by the Apostle a *denying the Lord that bought them*; which perfectly agrees with the popish Idolatry. For as (according to * *Job*) Idolatry at large, is (virtually) a *Denial of the God that is above, who made us*; so the Worship paid to Saints and Angels as Mediators, is a virtual Denial of the God that *redeemed us*; that is, of *the Lord that bought us*, and who is the sole Mediator between God and Man. Whatever more there is in this, it is visible, at least, that the *Characters* thus far suit the *Men*; and if they agree in these Respects, we shall without Difficulty be able to shew an Agreement in the particular Circumstance now before us, their *making Merchandise* of the Christian People by Fraud and Falshood; which appears principally in these two Points;

I. In their Doctrine of the Pope's Supremacy.

* Chap. xxxi. Verse 28.

2. IN

2. In their Doctrine of Purgatory with its Appendages.

As to the First, they tell us that “St. Peter was Bishop of Rome—That he was the Chief of the Apostles; and had a Jurisdiction and Controul over them all—That the Power which St. Peter had was vested in his Successors, the Bishops of Rome, forever; and, in Consequence of this—That every Bishop of Rome is *universal* Bishop, having Authority over all the Churches of the christian World”. This is the Doctrine.

BUT you may deny that St. Peter was ever Bishop of Rome; for it does not appear from History that he was. You may say farther, that the very Notion of an *universal* Bishop is chimerical and mad; and that, till the Bishops of Rome grew Mad, it was never thought of. It may as well be supposed, that God should put all the Kingdoms of the Earth under one King, as that he should put all the Churches of the Earth under one Bishop. The one is as practicable as the other. Enterprizing Men have formed vast Projects; and by a wonderful

ful Concurrence of Events, have raised Empires *almost* universal. But they are sunk and gone; oppressed by their own Weight, and buried in their own Ruins; as, we trust, this spiritual Monarchy shall be, when God's appointed Time for it is come.

BUT the Thing principally to be attended to, as what falls most within the Compass of your Observation, is, that the Corner-stone of this Fabrick is stark naught. St. *Peter* (say they) had Authority over the Rest of the Apostles; therefore the Successors of St. *Peter*, the Bishops of *Rome*, must have Authority over all other Bishops. The Conclusion is not good, supposing the Premises were true. But where do they learn that St. *Peter* had Authority over the Rest of the Apostles? Look into the New Testament and see if you can find any Signs of it. Christ said to *Peter*, *Upon this Rock I will build my Church*, Matt. xvi. 18. But this was not peculiar to *Peter*. All the Apostles were Rocks upon which *the Church was built*, resting upon Christ the chief Corner-stone. Eph. ii. 20. Christ said to St. *Peter*, *I will*
give

give unto thee the Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt bind—shall be bound;—and whatsoever thou shalt loose—shall be loosed, &c. *Matt.* xvi. 19.

But this very Power is given to ALL the Apostles, and in the same Words, *Matt.* xviii. 18. Again; Christ said to *Peter*, feed my Sheep. *Joh.* xxi. 17. But this is so far from being peculiar to him, that it is not peculiar to the whole Order of the Apostles; for it is the Office of every ordinary Minister to feed the Flock of Christ. *I Pet.* v. 2.

THESE which I have mentioned are the principal Texts, upon which the Papists ground their Doctrine of St. *Peter's* Supremacy over the Rest of the Apostles; and you see plainly that they prove no such Matter; for it is impossible to shew a Privelege to one from a Grant that was given in common to all. But read the Acts of the Apostles, and see how the *Fact* stands. There you will find that the Apostles acted and consulted in common, without considering St. *Peter* as having any Superiority over them. He was called to give an Account of his baptizing *Cornelius*; and he delivered

ed his Opinion in the Council at *Jerusalem*, without any Strain of Authority over the Rest *. *St. Paul* expressly denies that the other Apostles had, any of them, Authority or Jurisdiction over him; and says in plain Words, that *he was the Apostle of the Uncircumcision as Peter was of the Circumcision*. Gal. ii. 7. He withstood Peter to his Face when he thought that he deserved Blame. Vers. xi. He speaks of his own Line and Share, and says, he did not stretch himself beyond his own Measure; plainly insinuating that, within his own Province, he was accountable to none but to him that had sent him. 2 Cor. x. 14. This was also the Sense of the primitive Church, that all Bishops were Brethren, Collegues, and Fellow-bishops. Jurisdictions there were of Bishops over Bishops in the primitive Times, as there are now; but this was never considered as a Matter of divine Right founded upon *St. Peter's* Supremacy over the Rest of the Apostles, but as a Matter of ecclesiastical Institution only, for the better ordering and governing of the Church;

* See Act. xi. 2, 3, and 15. 7, &c.

to whose Regulations it was subject, and in which the Bishop of *Rome* had but a Share, with other Bishops. You do not expect that I should enter into the Detail of all these Particulars, which would be leading you a great Deal beyond your Depth. But I speak a known Fact when I tell you, that protestant Writers have proved beyond all Contradiction, that how ready soever the Bishops of *Rome* were, on all Occasions, to extend their Jurisdiction, they never pretended to a Supremacy over other Bishops till above 600 Years after Christ. And it is very remarkable (and should always be remembered by you, when you are tampered with upon this Head) that *so late as* this it was renounced even by a Bishop of *Rome* in the most solemn Terms. It was Pope Gregory the First, who when the Emperor *Mauricius* would have given the Bishop of *Constantinople* the Title of UNIVERSAL BISHOP, compared it to the Pride of Lucifer, and says that, *he who assumed it was the FORERUNNER OF ANTICHRIST*; and as he renounced all Claim to it himself, so he affirmed that none of his Predecessors had ever aspired

aspired to such a Power. So unhappily (again) has the Church of *Rome* born Witness to her own Apostacy! It may be made a Question, perhaps, whether if this Title had been offered to the Bishop of *Rome* himself, as it was to the Bishop of *Constantinople*, *Gregory* would have refused it. It is, however certain, that his next Successor but one, Pope *Boniface* the Third, accepted it from the Emperor *Phocas*, as a Complement for the Offers made of his Service to support him in his ill gotten Empire. By what Fraud and Violence; by what Wars and Treachery; by what Follies, Vices and Distresses, or Interests of temporal Princes, this Claim has been since upheld; it would be a long History to tell you, and as needless. You have enough for your Purpose already, and for mine; which is only to shew you, that the Pope's Supremacy is no Appointment of Christ or his Apostles, but a Creature of the civil Power, and a gross Usurpation upon the Rights and Liberties of the christian Church; and that we, in shaking it off (as we did at the Reformation) did no more than re-

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store this Nation to its true christian Freedom, putting the Direction of Church Affairs under our own Bishops and Clergy, without depending on any foreign Power whatsoever. It was some Ages after the Gospel had been here planted, before the Pope's Jurisdiction was acknowledged and received; and when *Austin* the Monk (who came over, as I have before said, to convert the *Saxons*) first attempted to establish it, the old *British* Bishops strenuously opposed him, affirming that this Church had been always governed by its own Bishops; and that they knew of no Right, which any foreign Prelate had to exercise Authority in this Island. This will furnish you with a short and sufficient Answer to a stale Objection of the Papists, with which they are wont to make great Outcry, viz. that by separating from the Church of *Rome*, you have separated yourselves from the catholic Church and therefore from Christ. For there can be no Sin in withdrawing ourselves from an Authority which hath no Jurisdiction over us. The Sin would be in *not* separating ourselves from those who

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who have separated themselves from Christ by their Idolatries; as I have heretofore observed.

LET us go on then to the next Point, the Doctrine of PURGATORY with its Appendages. The Doctrine is this,
 “ That every Man is liable to temporal
 “ and to eternal Punishment for his Sins.
 “ —That God, upon the Account of the
 “ Death and Intercession of Christ, does
 “ indeed pardon Sin as to its eternal
 “ Punishment, but that the Sinner is
 “ still liable to temporal Punishment;
 “ which he must expiate by Acts of
 “ Penance and Sorrow in this World;
 “ together with such other Sufferings as
 “ God shall think fit to lay upon him;
 “ but that if he does not expiate these
 “ in this Life, there is a State of Suffer-
 “ ing and Misery in the next World,
 “ where the Soul is to bear the tempo-
 “ ral Punishment of its Sins, which may
 “ continue longer or shorter as God
 “ shall think fit”.

THIS State of suffering in the next World, is what they call *Purgatory*, be-
 cause it is supposed that herein good
 Men

Purgatory, and Indulgences. 71

Men (for *bad* ones have no Place there) are *purged* and *cleansed* from their Sins as a Qualification for their Admittance into Heaven. And the Papiſts will tell you, that there are two Ways of ſhortening this Time of ſuffering. One is, the ſaying over ſo many Maſſes or Prayers by a Priest; the other, the INDULGENCE of the Pope, who, they ſay, has the *Treasure* of the whole Church in his Hands, and has Power to diſpoſe of it for the Benefit of Souls in Purgatory, as he ſhall think fit. If you would know what this *Treasure* is, it is the *Merits* of Chriſt and the Saints; I ſay *the Saints*, who (it ſeems) had more Vertue than was neceſſary for their own Uſe, and have left ſome behind them (as Men do their Eſtates) to be diſpoſed of for the Uſe of others. Can you be ſerious, and forbear laughing when you hear ſuch Stuff as this! If you *can*, turn once once more to your Bibles, and ſee what you can find there of theſe Matters. Was it ever heard of (except among Papiſts) that the Attonement made by the Blood of Chriſt, which diſcharges us from eternal Punishment, does not as
fully

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fully discharge us from temporal Punishment; or that what Christ hath not attoned for, Man may attonne for himself by his voluntary Sufferings? Never. I say not, that God may not call good Men to Sufferings in this World. He often doth it. Nor do I say that a good Man may not chastise himself by Acts of Mortification and Self-denial. It is often proper, and sometimes necessary. But, I say, that in neither Case are such Sufferings to be considered as *Expiations* supplying any Defect in the Efficacy of Christs Attonement—(which in all Points is full and sufficient) but sent, in the one Case, as the Exercise of our Virtues for farther Improvement; and submitted to in the other, as Instruments to subdue fleshly Appetite, and make us the more Masters, of ourselves. Again; Do you any where read in Scripture that there is such a State of Suffering and Misery as the Papists talk of, where the Soul is to bear the temporal Punishment of its Sins if they are not expiated in this Life? No where; and should I repeat to you the Texts that are commonly produced for this Purpose, you would

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would be amazed to think by what Art it is possible to draw from them such a Conclusion as this. The Scripture says very little of the intermediate State between Death and the Resurrection. But what it does say favours the Opinion that the Souls of good Men, after they are separated from the Body, go to a Place of Rest and Happiness. I will not enter into this Point; for the main Stress of the Matter does not lie here. Be it as they say, that the Souls of good Men must suffer a Purgation before they are admitted into Heaven; what hath the Pope to do with this? What have the Priests to do with it? If a Man be laid in Gaol for a Debt, and another pretends an Authority to set him at Liberty; he must shew his Warrant from the Creditor, or his Pretensions will be treated with Contempt. The Creditor, in this Case, is God; and when the Pope will shew us the Warrant, by which God hath made him his Agent to lengthen or shorten the Time of Purgation according to his Discretion, it shall be admitted. Till then it is an impudent Pretension. I should think, that if

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God had intended to trust any Mortal upon Earth with such a Power as this, the Pope would have been the last Man he would have chose. For what *use* does he make of it? Upon what *Condition* does he grant his Favours? Why sometimes you are to be sent upon a Fool's Errand; as suppose, to visit *Jerusalem* and the holy Land, or the Shrine of some Saint, it may be at some hundreds of Miles Distance. Sometimes you are to say such or such Prayers, or to pay such a Sum of Money into the Pope's Chamber. And (what is worst of all) sometimes you will be sent to cut Mens Throats; to raise Seditions, and Wars, and Rebellions for the Good of the Catholick Cause. What Notions must Men have of God, who can think to please him by such Methods as these!——But it is not enough to see how the Case stands between God and the Pope; it is necessary likewise to consider how it stands between the Pope and the Saints too, of whose superabundant Merits he pretends to have the Disposal. I will not dispute whether a Man may not have more Virtue than is
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strictly

strictly necessary to carry him to Heaven; but this I may say, upon the Authority of God's Word, that let a Man have ever so much Virtue, he may make great Advantage of it *to himself* when he comes there. If he accepts to himself the Advantages which his superior Qualifications will naturally yield, his Friend cannot claim the Benefit of them too. If you offer me a Sum of Money that you owe me, and I take it, the Debt is discharged; and I cannot upon the Foot of the same Account draw upon you for the same Sum, or any Part of it, to be paid to the Use of another. A Question then will arise upon this Case. How do we know that the Saints are willing to part with their superabundant Merits? If a Man has more Money than he wants for his own necessary Occasions, it will not presently follow that he is willing to give the Residue away to the Poor; or if he be, it is likely he will desire to have the Disposal of it himself. Another Question also will arise; If the Saints should be willing to *part* with their superabundant Merits, and that the Pope should dispose of them

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for the Use of those whom he shall think fit; How does it appear that God will accept them? If I owe you a Sum of Money, and my Friend offers to pay it for me, you are bound to accept it, But I do not know that God is bound to place the Vertues of one Man to another's Account. You see then, that there are several Things necessary to justify the Pope in his Claim to grant Indulgences; and, if you will give me leave to represent this Matter to you in an easy and familiar Light, there should be something equivalent to what our Lawyers call an *Indenture tripartite*, in which three Parties are concerned. The Saints must covenant to give up their superabundant Merits. God must covenant to accept them. And the Pope must be empowered by both to dispose of them as he pleases. I know not where to go to search for such an Instrument as this, unless it be in the Pope's Archives, where, possibly, such a Curiosity may be found by those who will give themselves the Trouble to look for it. To be serious upon a serious Subject; and to say all in one Word.

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This *transferring* of Merit from one Man to another is a most senseless Kind of *Brokery*, and in the Nature of it impossible. We know that Christ died for our Sins. We know of no other Propitiation than this; and if a Man cannot atone for himself by any Thing he can do; much less can *his Brother* atone for him.

LET us now go on to see what Share the Priest has in this boasted Work of delivering Souls out of Purgatory; which is the saying so many *Messes*, or so many *Prayers*. As to these *Messes*, you must know that they are nothing else than saying over the Communion Office, and eating the Bread and drinking the Wine; which the Priest frequently does by himself, without so much as one Soul to communicate with him. And now I have said this I have said enough. For this is plainly a Corruption of Christ's Institution, which in the Nature of it requires, that many should partake of it in common. And is it possible to think, that so absurd an Act, done contrary to Christ's Appointment, should avail to the Pardon of Sin? In

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Prayer there is more Sense, though not better Warrant for the Use of it to the Purpose we are now speaking of. God hath commanded us to pray for one another under the Troubles and Distresses of this present Life; and were we sure that the departed Souls of good Men are distressed in the other World, and had the same Warrant to pray for their Deliverance, it would be right. But the Scripture says nothing of the one or the other; and therefore it is foolish and superstitious. It was an early Practice in the Christian Church to pray for the Souls of those who were *departed in the Lord*, that they might have their perfect *Consummation in Glory*. But this is so far from being an Argument *for* Purgatory, that it is an Argument *against* it; for the Practice supposes that these departed Souls were in a State of Rest and Happiness though *incomplete*. It is not unlikely, however, that in after Ages this Notion misunderstood and corrupted (as many other old Notions were) might give Rise to the Doctrine of Purgatory; unless we may rather suppose that it was borrowed (as

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Dæmon or *Saint Worship* was, from the Heathens, who (many of them) certainly believed a State of Purgation. But, be this as it will, we are very sure it came not from Christ or his Apostles.

BUT how are you to come at these Masses and these Prayers? At great Expence; for the Priests will not do their Work for nothing. So that if you are rich you may cut off some *hundreds* (and some of them, I think, talk of *thousands*) of Years of Misery. But if you are poor you must take your Chance, and stay till your State of Purgation naturally expires. But I would advise these Men of more Money than Sense, before they part with their Money, to consider what they part with it for. It is to be released from Purgatory. But how do they know they shall ever come there? *Hell*, not *Purgatory*, is the Place for bad Men; so that if it should be, that your Portion is not among *the Righteous*; you will pay your Money, and go to the Devil into the Bargain. And what Security can you have that this may not be the Case? None, but the Priest's Absolution,

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which (with their Leave) is a Security not worth a single Farthing.

BUT absurd as all these Doctrines are, the Pope and his Clergy had Dexterity enough, in dark Ages, to pass them upon the People, whom they gulled and cheated of their Money in a most scandalous and shameful Manner. What immense Sums have formerly been drawn out of this Kingdom, by *Peter-pence*, by Appeals, by Investitures, and other Tributes challenged by the Bishops of *Rome* in Consequence of their pretended Supremacy, our Histories will tell you : And so vast were the Endowments settled upon the Clergy within the Realm by deluded Men for the Purpose of saying Masses to redeem the Souls of themselves or their Ancestors from Purgatory, that it greatly impoverished the whole Nation; and had not the Scandals of the Clergy on the one hand, and the Statutes of *Montmain* on the other, restrained the Profuseness that the World was wrought up to by these false Notions, it might have ended in the Ruin of the Kingdom. But it pleased God to make these Impostures,

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by which the Church of *Rome* had maintained her Grandure for some hundreds of Years, the Instruments, at last, of pulling her down in many Parts of the christian World. This Revolt began in *Germany*, where the Pope's Indulgences were set to sale in so gross a Manner, that *Martin Luther* (himself a Papist and a Monk) took Offence at it, and wrote against them, and against many other popish Corruptions. This Spirit spread apace throughout all *Germany*, and soon found its Way into *England*, where *Henry the VIIth* abolished the Pope's Authority; in this beginning that blessed Reformation, which was afterwards completed by his Son *Edward the VIth*, and his Daughter Queen *Elizabeth*.

I SHALL presume you by this Time sufficiently instructed what Popery is, and for what Reasons we have separated ourselves from the Communion of the Church of *Rome*. You are now desired to look back a little, and, upon a Review of the Whole, to consider, whether you are willing to see Popery restored, and become again the Religion of our Coun-

try. I am persuaded there is not one of you who will not answer, in the Words of St. Paul, *Let us stand fast in the Liberty wherewith Christ has made us free; and let us not be entangled again with the Yoke of Bondage.* Gal. v. 1. And is it not natural and obvious from hence to reflect, how careful we ought to be in our several Stations, to endeavour the Preservation of our civil Establishment, which stands as a Barrier between Popery and us? Take away our Establishment, and suppose a popish Government set up in its Room; the Loss of our Religion and Liberties will follow of Course; and how much this amounts to you have seen. You must have no Judgment of your own, but must submit implicitly to what the Priests tell you.—You must forsake Christ to serve Idols.—You will be deprived of one half of the Sacrament, and be made to worship the very Elements, that you take in at your Mouths, and that go out again at the common Draught.—You must exchange that grave, sensible and manly Worship, which the Church of *England* prescribes

to

to you, for mere Gibberish that you do not understand.—You must have your Houses haunted by Inquisitors, who will be perpetually whispering in your Ears, and in the Ears of your Wives, your Sons and your Daughters, and will make themselves your Masters, by their being made privy to the Secrets of your Families.—You will have your Consciences ensnared, and your Purses squeezed by Impositions of various Kinds that will not profit you. If you like all this, then open your Gates to a popish Government and bid it welcome. But if not, at your Peril you must keep it out; for if you take it within your Walls, their *two-handed Engine* stands at the Door ready to strike when all other Means fail; and you will have but this alternative left; either to comply against your Consciences, or to suffer Persecution for your Consciences Sake.

Some good natured *English* Papist perhaps will tell you, that “they are not for such rough Measures. That Time has altered their Opinion and Sense of Things; and that Experience

"perience hath convinced them, to
 "how little Purpose it would be to at-
 "tempt to make any Change in the
 "national Religion and Worship, and
 "that therefore nothing of this Sort is
 "to be feared it"—Whenever you hear
 a Papist entering upon such Talk as this
 (for *Talk* it is, and nothing better) stop
 him short; and tell him, that a Papist
in Power, and a Papist *out of* Power are
 different Things; and that if *he* has
 learned something by Experience (of
 which you have no Proof but his own
 Word) *you* also have learned something
 by Experience (which all History ve-
 rifies) *viz.* That Papists are never to be
 trusted in such Cases. Those of you
 who are acquainted with the *English*
 History, will not fail to recollect the
 bloody Queen *Mary's* Days, when so
 many pious Men were burnt at the
 Stake in *Smithfield*, and many other Parts
 of the Kingdom, because they would
 not renounce the Protestant Religion,
 and turn Papists. *James* the Second was
 reaching at the same Mark, but his
 Hands were too short, and he fell a Sa-
 crifice to his Bigotry. This Example
 should

should indeed teach the Papists something; but it is not half so good an Argument that in Fact they *have* made or would make a proper Use of it; as this, with the concurrent Examples of all Ages, in all Places where Popery has prevailed, is why you should take Care never to put it into their Power to hurt you. But you need not to go backward for Examples. Look into *France* or *Spain*, or other popish Countries, and see what is doing there even *now*. Every common News Paper will tell you *what*; and every common Understanding (unless weak Prejudices, or a false Heart stand in the Way) must be convinced that what is done abroad will be done, or * attempted, at home, if ever a popish Government should revive again; and *Revolutions* are too brisk Remedies to be repeated often.

But I should hope that much Argument upon this Head may not be necessary. I will suppose you convinced that it is necessary our civil Constitution should be preserved. Who shall

* See Lord *Bolingbroke's* Letter to Sir *William Wyndham*.

preserve

preserve it but the same providential Hand, by which it was established? *Except the Lord build the House their Labour is but lost that build it; except the Lord keep the City, the Watchman waketh but in vain.* States and Kingdoms are in the Hand of God; who raiseth up one, and putteth down another, as his Wisdom directs. And as there is no standing against his Power when he shall doom a Nation to Destruction; so there is nothing which will so certainly bring down his heavy Vengeance, as the Abuse of his Mercies, and Unfruitfulness under the Means which he has made use of to reform us. This suggests to us a Point very fit for our Consideration, viz. How much are we the better in our Manners, for this Change in our Faith and Worship? If the Answer falls on the favourable Side, and we can shew Improvements suitable to the Advantages we are under; it will be reasonable Ground of Hope, that He who hath hitherto protected us against the restless Attempts of the Church of *Rome* will yet continue his Protection to us. But if (in the Words
of

of St. Peter) we use our Liberty as a Cloke for Maliciousness *; if we grow worse under the Means that should make us better (which is too apparently the Case) let us make haste to repent and amend, lest God casts us off and gives us up as a Prey to our Enemies,

THERE is one original Defect in our Reformation, which hath opened the Way to all this Mischief; and that is the Want of Discipline. Startle not at the Word. For Discipline there must be in the Church, if you would have a Church; as there must be in the State, unless you will throw up all civil Government. Liberty without Restraint, is the very Notion of Anarchy; and will stand with the Being of no Society in the World. When therefore private Confessions and Absolutions were so far laid aside as to be left to every Man's Discretion, the natural Step had been to have revived the ancient publick Discipline, which had been long grown into disuse; and our Reformers would have done it, if they had been able. But the same Spirit of Licentiousness,

shall dwell in * 1 Pet. ii. 16. which

which threw this Discipline out at first, stood in the Way to hinder it's re-admission. I would not so much as with the Restoration of the ancient Discipline in the full Rigour of it, as it stood in the third and fourth Centuries; no, nor, if I knew the exact Measure of it as it was exercised even by the Apostles themselves, should I think it a sufficient Reason to insist upon the same Measure now. Matters of Discipline are not (as Articles of Faith) always to be kept to the same Standard, but may be suffered to vary as the Circumstances of Times and Places vary. Our Saviour says, that *new Wine* must not be put into *old Bottles*; and *St. Paul*, that *strong Meat* must not be given to *Babes*. But so much Power should certainly have been left to the Church as should have enabled her to have made Men ashamed of their Vices, and to have secured the most solemn Acts of our Religion from open Profanation, by separating notorious Offenders from her Communion, and requiring proper Evidence of their Repentance, before they should be admitted again into christian Fellowship.

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This

This was what our Reformers * *wished*, but with no Effect; the Consequence of which hath been, that from one Extream we are got to another, and that instead of paying too much regard to the Church, as the Papists do, many of us live as if we had nothing to do with the Church, nor the Church with us.

THE Subject of Discipline is every Act which concerns a Man as a Member of the visible Church of Christ; which you will find briefly summed up by the Apostle, *Act. ii. 42.* where speaking of the new Converts to Christianity, he says that *they continued stedfastly in the Apostles Doctrine and Fellowship, and in breaking of Bread and in Prayers.* By the *Apostles Doctrine* is meant the *christian Faith*, which is, and necessarily must be the Corner-stone, upon which the christian Church, considered as a visible Society, is founded. But when a Man has received the christian Faith, and is admitted into the Church by Baptism, he is to give publick Testimony of his continuance in the same Faith, by such social Acts as Christ hath appointed

*baptism * Communion Office.*

for

for that Purpose, and in the joint Use of which the very Form of the Church, considered as a visible Society, consists. These are *breaking of Bread, and Prayers*; that is, the joining in the publick Worship of the Church, and in the Participation of the Sacrament of the Lords Supper. It is presumed that those who behave well in these Points will be careful to avoid a wicked, immoral Life, which of all others is the greatest blemish to a Christian, and deserves the severest Censures of the Church. But let a Man's moral Life be as blameless as you will suppose, he is not to be reckoned a good Christian who neglects those Duties in which the proper *Distinction* of a Christian lies, without Rebuke.

THESE Things then should duly be attended to, if we would shew ourselves the true Sons of the Reformation: we may do more for ourselves, than Laws can do for us; nor should we want Encouragement to it, if we would consider the Subserviency of the Gospel Ordinances to that inward Purity of the Heart, which is the End and Completion of all, and the immediate Ground
of

of our Acceptance with God. The End of all Societies is the same, to wit; to collect, as it were, into one common Stock, the natural Strength that lies dispersed among the Individuals for the good of the Whole. The Strength of a Nation are the Riches of a Nation; and the Riches of the Church are the Vertues of its Members, in which, by the mutual Exercise of these social Duties, every Man lends a helping Hand to his Neighbour's Improvement. It is for this Reason that Christ hath appointed a visible Church; and that the Apostle exhorts us *not to forsake the assembling ourselves together*; viz. that we may *provoke one another to Love and to good Works*. Heb. x. 24, 25. And to engage us the more effectually to this we have the Promise of a special Blessing to attend the Prayers of Christ's Church, and the Prayers of those whom he hath appointed to minister to him in holy Things. The Passages of Scripture to this Purpose, you have heard before, and will not improperly be repeated in this place. Our Saviour says, *if two of you shall agree on Earth touching any*

any Thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in Heaven; for where two or three are gathered together in my Name there am I in the midst of them. Matt. xviii. 19, 20.

And St. James, Confess your Faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent Prayer of a righteous Man availeth much. Jam. v. 16.

God is wise and good: All his Works shew it. And there are visible Marks of both in this Appointment, however some may affect not to see it. Such as these will ask, What can the Prayers of the Church or of the Minister do, that every Man's Prayers for himself will not do? Is God moved by the Voice of a Multitude? Or is he a Respector of Persons? And let me ask in my turn—Do you believe that your own Prayers for yourself, are a proper Means to procure God's Blessing. If you are a Christian you do. But why do you believe it? May it not be returned upon you——Does God want to be told what is fit for us? Or is he, like a Man, to be overcome by

several Members to each other according

by Importunity? The sensible Answer is, No; but God appoints that to be done by us, which He does *not* want, for *our* Sakes who *do* want it. We all of us want to be admonished of our Duties; and we cannot be admonished too often, considering that we are surrounded with many Infirmities. The Sum and Substance of all Duty is to *love the Lord our God with all our Hearts and with all our Souls*; and can there be a stronger Security for this placed about us than to be called upon daily to make Confession with our own Mouths, that all our Dependence is upon him? And as Prayer in general teaches us this great Lesson, so the *particular Circumstance* of our being called upon to perform this Duty, not privately and by our selves only, but with the joint voice of the whole Community of Christians, the Minister presiding and assisting, suggests to us many more. For does it not warmly admonish us of that Love and Charity that there ought to be between all the Members of the Church towards one another; as also of that Subordination that there is between the several Members to each other according

according to their several Stations in the Church? And when it is considered *whose* Church it is, and *whose* Ministers they are, does it not instruct us, as plainly as any Lesson in the Bible, upon *whom* we are to depend for the Forgiveness of our Sins; and that Christ, to whom we are all united as to one common Head, is the Saviour and Redeemer of us all? It is not the Number of Voices that is to be attended to; for if but *two or three are gathered together in the Name of Christ*, it is *the Church of Christ*, and he will be *in the Midst* of it, to accept and answer their Prayers. It is not the personal Qualifications of the Minister that are to be considered, but his publick Character as one appointed of God to pray for us, and *to bless us in his Name*. When we piously apply ourselves to God thro' these Appointments, it is *Religion* towards God, who will not suffer our Piety to go unrewarded. But if we neglect or despise them, we withdraw our selves from his Protection; and do the same absurd Thing in the Church which a Man would do in the State, who should Outlawry himself, and renounce the common Aids of the Society

Society of which he is a Member, to stand upon his own Bottom.

GIVE me leave to say it, Brethren (for it is a great Truth) that we hurt our selves more by our voluntary Separations from the Functions of the Clergy, than the Papists are hurt (or need be hurt) by their most servile Attachment to them. To be obliged to confess all, even our most secret Sins to a Priest, is, no doubt, a grievous Hardship, and may be attended with very mischievous Consequences; but these Consequences can reach no farther than to our *present* Estates. To pretend to pass Sentence upon Mens Consciences by Absolution, is great Folly and Presumption in him that does it; but it hurts nobody but those who trust to it, to the Neglect of that which alone we ought to trust to, the Reformation of our Lives. But the Neglect of the holy Sacrament, and of Prayer and of publick Instruction, on those Occasions on which it is the Duty of the Clergy to attend and assist us, eats out by degrees all Sense of Christianity, and leaves us in the Condition of mere Heathens, so much

much the more to our Shame (and no doubt to our Condemnation too) as all this is done wilfully and under the open Profession of that Faith which instructs us better. For this Reason I cannot but look upon that terrible Profanation of the Lord's Day (which comprehends all these Neglects, and) which is now grown to be even *fashionable*, as one of the worst Symptoms of these Times. Within my Remembrance the playing at Cards or Dice on *Sundays* was a Thing never heard of, except at Alehouses among the Dregs and Refuse of Mankind. To see a Gentleman upon the Road with his Coach and Equipage was a Thing very rare. How much the Case is now altered in these Respects every one's Observation will tell him. It is great Pity that this Thing is not better considered! The Examples of Men of Fashion have great Effect upon the lower Part of the World, and help to corrupt thousands whom we, with all our Preaching, shall not be able to reform. We see it in nothing plainer than in this very Case. For from this *Slight* put upon the Lord's Day by the great
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Ones, the little Ones have taken their Cue, and we begin to see almost as many Carts and Waggon, and Drovers of Cattle upon the Road on a Sunday, as upon any common Day of the Week. Should this grow to be universal; and the Duties of the Sunday be wholly laid aside, what less can be the Consequence than the total Abolition of Christianity from among us. I bless God this is not yet the Case. Some serious and orderly Persons we have yet left, as faithful Witnesses to bear their Testimony against the Corruptions of the Times; and whilst there are such, these Practices will be a publick Offence against Decency, and good Manners, as well as against Religion; a Consideration that should have some Weight with those who value themselves upon their Distinctions of Rank and Fortunes, how little Sense of Religion forever they may have themselves.

I TAKE no Pleasure in laying open the weak Side of my Country; but after having, with all Freedom, set before you the Corruptions of Popery, it was but just that I should remind you
F of

of those Things which want Reformation among ourselves. Fact will speak though I should be silent; that the publick Vertue is almost lost among us; offered up as a Sacrifice, partly to Ambition, and Avarice; partly to the vilest, and most brutal Lusts; and partly to the most *childish Vanities*, that were ever seen in any Nation, except that *one* Nation from whence we borrowed them; of whose Power we ought always to be jealous, and who having first corrupted our Morals, and more than *reconcill'd* us to her Language, Customs and Fashions, will find it, perhaps, not so difficult a Matter to reconcile us to her Religion and Government, if ever any unhappy Concurrence of Events, at home or abroad, shall open the Way to make an Attempt upon our Liberties. *Here* it is (*I take it*) that our true Danger from Popery lies; not in the feeble Efforts of a few disaffected Men among us; but, in our *Unfaithfulness* to our selves; in our putting our selves out of God's Protection by our wicked Works; which at the same time that it provokes

him

him to give us up, puts a Sword into our Enemies Hand to destroy us, and robs us of that Spirit which will be found necessary to our Defence whenever the Tryal comes. Is it possible to be conceived, in such a Case, that those will mind what Religion comes uppermost who sit loose to ALL Religion? How will the Unbeliever rejoyce, who has no other Reason for his Infidelity, than that he reads in his Bible the Sentence of God against himself for his Vices, to see the Scriptures shut up, and no other Rule left for his Conduct, than the loose Casuistry of the Church of Rome? Popery is void of Truth, and for this Reason best suited to the Taste of those who love not the Truth, and want those Salves for Conscience which Truth abhors.

It is necessary therefore to revive the Spirit of Religion among us; and there is one Thing which, as it has had the greatest Share in the Causes of its Decay, would of all other Things contribute most to its Restoration, I mean the Example of the upper Part of the World. To give this a Direction fa-

vourable to Religion is a great Work,
I own, to bring to effect; and whenever
it is done, it must be the Work of God
and not of Man. We may wish it, we
may pray for it; and we should do both.
But to shew that we are in earnest, we
should do one Thing more; we should
every Man begin at home, and mend
his own Manners, in which we shall have
this Comfort to trust to, that if we can
not save our Country we shall save our
selves.

no other Rule left for his Conduct,
than the loose Liberty of the Church,
of Rome; Poverty is void of Truth,
and for this Reason best suited to the
Taste of those who have not the Truth,
and want those selves not Confessions,

Your faithful Minister,

and Servant,

Harlestone,

Aug: 24, 1753

HENRY STEBBING.

POSTSCRIPT.

SINCE these Papers went to the Press, I have been informed upon the very best Authority, that popish Missionaries here in *England* have Power granted them by the Pope, “to grant
 “PLENARY INDULGENCES to all new
 “Converts from Heresy, and to all
 “the Faithful in general at the Point of
 “Death (*at least* to such of them as are
 “*contrite*) although they cannot confess;
 “and likewise to grant alike Indul-
 “gence, to ALL the Faithful under their
 “Care THREE TIMES every Year”.
 That in order to qualify themselves to obtain this Indulgence, the People are directed to “EXCITE in their Hearts,
 “the most *perfect Compunction* possible;
 “and after Confession, before or after
 “Communion, to say some Prayers in
 “the Day with great Devotion for a
 “quarter of an Hour, for several Ends;
 “one of which is, the *Exaltation* of the
 “*Catholick Church* and another, the EX-
 “TERMINATION OF HERESY”.

By

By this we may perceive what Sort of REPENTANCE that is which the Church of Rome now requires as necessary in order to Absolution. It is not a permanent Change of the Mind from evil to good, shewing itself by a correspondent Change in the Behaviour (which is the true Notion of Repentance) but it is a certain INWARD FEELING (here called *Compunction*) which a Man may WORK UP in himself in a very little Time; and if it does but last till the Ceremonies are over, it will be sufficient. This must be a great Inducement to those who can believe them to turn Papists; for who would not be saved at so cheap a Price? Especially when it is considered, that, upon the same easy Terms, the Grant is to be confirmed three Times every Year, and at the Hour of Death, when, it seems, even *Contrition* and *Confession* may be dispensed with! But farther. Let those learn and confess their Mistake, who think that *English* Papists are likely to be so harmless a People, when they see (as here they must see) that from the Moment

Moment of their Conversion, they are taught in their *very Prayers*, as a *Condition* of their Forgiveness at God's Hands, to root us up from the Face of the Earth as soon as they can.

ERRATA.

PAGE 20. l. 2, 3. r. Ministers. p. 29. l. 9. for Scene r. Score. p. 40. l. 10. r. fit. p. 53. l. 2. r. Occasions. p. 54. l. 11. r. Polity. p. 65. l. 2. rr. *shalt*. p. 85. l. 8. r. made. p. 90. l. 18. dele *without rebuke*, and put a full Point after *his*. p. 94. l. 22. after *towards God*, add these Words — it is applying to God IN THE NAME of Christ, — and put a Semicolon after *God*.

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